

Another Go at Johnson Policy Is Slated by Fulbright Panel

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Capitol Hill's chief critics of President Johnson's handling of foreign affairs will be at it again this week.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold public hearings on "foreign revolutions" and private sessions to study the Gulf of Tonkin incidents in 1964.

Like most of the committee's recent actions, the sessions are likely to produce new questioning of the Johnson administration's handling of crisis diplomacy and military strategy.

Serious Threat Unlikely

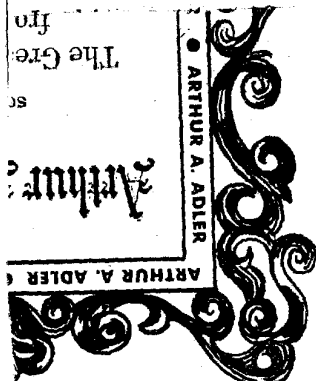
But though there will be criticism, there is unlikely to be any action against current policy.

Some of the committeemen — including chairman J. William Fulbright, D-Ark. — have been seeking ways to give Congress some say over foreign policy before the government gets itself "committed."

Pursuing that aim this year, the committee has taken steps which have increased the administration's irritation over responses to its policies, particularly in Vietnam and Korea.

Two weeks ago, the committee challenged Secretary of State Dean Rusk to come to open hearings on the Vietnam war—something he has refused to do in two years.

Rusk Bypassed



on the surface, at least, to be more of the "Fulbright seminars" on the background of international relations.

But it is a certainty that some of the senators' questions will get around to analyzing how uprisings abroad — as in the Congo, the Dominican Republic, or even in Vietnam — draw U.S. diplomatic and military participation.

Beyond the potential for embarrassing public critiques of the U.S. response in those circumstances, there seems little that the committee can do directly to alter responses of that kind in the future.

This week's one private session, on Tuesday morning, will be a discussion between the committee and retiring Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara about North Vietnamese attacks on U.S. vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin Aug. 2 and Aug. 4, 1964.

Those attacks prompted Johnson to ask congressional backing for military retaliation, and the resulting "Tonkin resolution" has been cited repeatedly by Johnson as authority for escalation of the U.S. war effort in Vietnam.

For some months, the committee's staff has been going over the Tonkin assaults to see just what kind of military provocation the U.S. faced then.

So far, the committee has not authorized a full-scale investigation of the incidents and whether the government overreacted to them, as some senators suspect.

But even if Tuesday's encounter with McNamara raises suspicions further, again there is little chance of committee action.

Change Unlikely

The deepening rift between top-ranking officials and the committee might tempt some senators to press for a modification of the "authority" granted by the Tonkin resolution. There is virtually no hope, however, that such a move would be approved by Congress.

And even if it were, Johnson has insisted that he has the power, under the Constitution, to act as he has done even without a Tonkin-type resolution.

Thus this week, like other recent weeks, could end with the irritation level higher but with presidential command of policy intact.